



Secretary of Standing Committee, Inquiry into Breastfeeding
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600

Please find attached our submission for the inquiry into breastfeeding being led by a Standing Committee on Health and Ageing, Parliament of Australia, House of Representatives. This submission has been compiled by members of Western Australian Association of Community Health Nurses.

Thank you

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COMMUNITY HEALTH NURSES WESTERN AUSTRALIA (INC)

**SUBMISSION TO THE BREASTFEEDING INQUIRY OF THE STANDING
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND AGEING, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA**

May 2007

Community Health Nurses Western Australia (CHNWA) is keen to contribute to the current Parliamentary Inquiry into ways in which the Australian Government can take a lead role to improve the health of the population through support for breastfeeding.

We understand that the health benefits for both infants and mothers have been well researched and documented¹, thus the foci of this submission are initiatives to encourage breastfeeding and the effectiveness of current measures to promote breastfeeding.

The following pages contain responses to Terms of Reference (d) and (e)

- (d) Initiatives to encourage breastfeeding.
- (e) Examine the effectiveness of current measures to promote breastfeeding.

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Maternal education

A woman's understanding, and therefore level of comfort about breastfeeding, needs to be developed prior to and during pregnancy. The antenatal period is a crucial time and opportunity for health carers to meet and build relationships with expectant mothers and is proven to assist better health outcomes for mother, baby and the family. This is an essential time for mothers to talk about their fears, concerns and expectations about breastfeeding and have the opportunity to explore how they can give themselves and their baby/s the best chance to breastfeed successfully.

Recommended Strategy:

Australian Government to support:

- Breast Feeding Education which contains information addressing the realities of breastfeeding and provide practical support through problem solving
- Breastfeeding support which can influence the intended duration of breastfeeding
- A universal breastfeeding education program for expectant mothers that includes group session and individual (one-on-one) information. ²

Workforce training and education

In order to successfully implement and sustain the provision of such a program, ongoing workforce development and an injection of resources is required. Where an antenatal program of this type is currently provided, there are limited resources and constant pressures of time and other priorities for midwives, child health nurses and volunteer breastfeeding counsellors. Expectant mothers have limited access to such programs, where they exist.

Of relevance also are the many variations in the information and advice provided, not only between individual midwives, who may work in the same health service, also between midwives and child health nurses. Mothers report confusion about the differing information and advice they receive which can be distressing and contributes to the level of success (or lack of) in breastfeeding.

Early discharge from hospital and lack of support post-discharge, results in many mothers ceasing breastfeeding prior to 'establishing' breastfeeding. Thus in the immediate postnatal period and for the initial 6 to 8 weeks after birth, midwives and child health nurses need to provide consistent breastfeeding information and support to new mothers/parents.

In order to be responsive, effective and sustainable, different models of service and resources are required for metropolitan areas and rural and remote areas. How mothers' access good, evidence based, up to date breastfeeding information, education and support varies greatly. Midwives and child health nurses have traditionally provided primary universal information, support and education on breastfeeding. To effectively and efficiently use our existing resources, this knowledge needs to be updated

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so that all new mothers can access this resource and support when they have their baby/s.

Recommended Strategies:

Australian Government to:

- Include breastfeeding education in continuing education credentials for relevant health professionals e.g. General Practitioners, Paediatricians
- Set a statewide breastfeeding education standard for all midwives and child health nurses.

Access to professional support

Rural and remote Specialist Lactation Consultants, Child Health Nurses, Aboriginal and Ethnic Health Workers and Midwives often work in isolation. There is a high attrition rate of these health care workers which impacts upon the level of services provided. Parents living in rural and remote areas experience difficulties accessing services and also experience difficulties related to geographical isolation from their own families, and often require additional support from health care workers.

Access to Specialist Lactation Consultants is also varied in metropolitan, rural and remote regions. Mothers can make direct contact with the local Lactation Consultant where there is one, or can be referred by either a Midwife or Child Health Nurse where more comprehensive education and support is needed.

Recommended Strategies:

Australian Government to:

- Improve parent's access to postnatal lactation problem solving avenues.
- Provide Medicare rebates for Lactation Consultants
- Development of nationally accepted training and education materials including multi-media, parent information packs, childcare and early learning centre provider information.

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Provision of consistent expert information and advice

For a range of reasons, general practitioners and practice nurses involved in maternal and child health care may provide inconsistent or limited breastfeeding information and support.

Recommended Strategies:

The Australian Government to strongly support the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI)

- Support a more comprehensive package of measures which promote breastfeeding and improve child nutrition.
- Development of nationally accepted competencies in breastfeeding education for primary health care professionals

Community acceptance of breast-feeding in public

Public perception and acceptance of breastfeeding varies from mothers being 'shunned' and excluded from public spaces, to mothers being encouraged and facilities provided.

Recommended Strategies:

Australian Government to support:

- The implementation of baby friendly workplace policies including better breastfeeding facilities and use of multi-media at workplaces, shopping centres, restaurants, public transport and recreation centres.
- Extension of paid maternity leave
- Promote breastfeeding as a social norm
- Influence the attitude and beliefs of parent support networks, particularly partners and community.

References

1. Australian Breast Feeding Association, *Comments on the National Agenda for Early Childhood*, 2004.
2. Medscape Medical News, *Simple Antenatal Preparation Improves Breast-Feeding Practice*, 2007. www.medscape.com/viewarticle/550406